

Statement Announcing the Award of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Gaylord Nelson

April 21, 1995

I am pleased to announce my intention to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to former Senator Gaylord Nelson, who as State Legislator, Governor, and Senator championed the protection of our natural resources. As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of Earth Day, his creation, it is fitting that we honor this great American's lifetime of public service.

In establishing Earth Day, Gaylord Nelson helped us to recognize that our fragile environment was increasingly at peril and that each of us could make a difference. His work has

inspired all Americans to take responsibility for the planet's well-being and for our children's future.

I look forward to presenting the Medal to Senator Nelson.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
April 21, 1995.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on the Oklahoma City Bombing

April 21, 1995

The President. Good afternoon. First let me say how very proud I am of the swift and decisive and determined work of law enforcement officials on this case throughout the country. I know every American is proud of them, too. Their continued vigilance makes me sure that we will solve this crime in its entirety and that justice will prevail.

Today I want to say a special word of thanks to the Justice Department, under the able leadership of the Attorney General, to Director Freeh and all the hundreds of people in the FBI who have worked on this case, to the men and women of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, to all the Federal authorities, and to all the State and local enforcement officials, especially those in Oklahoma who have been working on this case. And of course, I'd like to say a personal thanks, as I know all Americans would, to the Oklahoma lawman whose vigilance led to the initial arrest of the suspect.

As I said on Wednesday, justice for these killers will be certain, swift, and severe. We will find them. We will convict them. And we will seek the death penalty for them.

Finally, I know I speak for all Americans when once again I extend our deepest thanks to the brave men and women who are still involved in the rescue teams. Let us not forget

them. There is a lot of work for them still to do. It is difficult, and it is often heartbreaking now.

Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the people in Oklahoma City. And let me say again: You will overcome this moment of grief and horror. You will rebuild. And we will be there to work with you until the work is done.

Q. Mr. President, is there a sense now, sir, that this was not a foreign threat, that this was something from within our own borders?

The President. Let me say that I have never and the Justice Department has never said that it was a foreign threat. But the most important thing that you understand is that even though this is a positive development, this investigation has a lot of work still to be done in it, and therefore it would be—it would be wrong to draw any conclusions. There have been lots of twists and turns in this investigation. But I would say to the American people, we should not assume, as I said yesterday, that we should not assume that any people from beyond our borders are involved in it. We should not assume anything, except what we know.

Q. Any idea about motive, Mr. President? Anything in terms of the one suspect who's been arrested, any feeling about what—where he was or who he was or what he was up to?

The President. I would defer, with the same comment that the Attorney General and Director Freeh had on that, that we simply must not speculate on that at this time.

Q. Mr. President, will this prompt the United States—or the Government to take a new and a tougher look at the white supremacist groups, the hate groups, the militias? Is this going to trigger any kind of crackdown?

The President. Let me say that we need to finish this investigation now. We need to focus on this investigation. We need to finish this investigation. We need to finish the rescue. We then need to obviously examine anew, as we will over the next few days, the sufficiency of our efforts in the whole area of terrorism.

Maybe it would be helpful—let me just take a few moments to talk about what we have been doing for the last couple of years before the Oklahoma City incident, because I think it is apparent to any observant person that all civilized societies have to be on their guard against terrorism.

We have increased the counterterrorism budgets and resources of the FBI and the CIA. We arrested a major terrorist ring in New York before they could consummate their plans to blow up the U.N. and tunnels in New York City. We've retrieved terrorists who have fled abroad, as I said yesterday, from Pakistan, the Philippines, from Egypt, and elsewhere. We broke up a major terrorist ring before they could consummate their plans to blow up airplanes flying over the Pacific. We brought together all the various agencies of the Federal Government that would be involved in rescue and in response to a terrorist action and did a comprehensive practice earlier. And some of that work, I think, was seen in the very efficient way that they carried out their work at Oklahoma City.

And finally, let me say, there's been a lot of activity that the public does not see, most of which I should not comment on. But let me give you one example. There was one recent incident of which I was—or with which I was intimately familiar, which involved a quick and secret deployment of a major United States effort of FBI and FEMA and Public Health Service and Army personnel because we had a tip of a possible terrorist incident, which, thank goodness, did not materialize. But we went to the place, and we were ready. We were ready

to try to prevent it. And if it occurred, we were ready to respond.

So we have been on top of this from the beginning. Finally, let me say, I issued the Executive order which gives us the ability to try to control funding more strictly. And I have sent counterterrorism legislation to the Hill, which I hope will be acted upon quickly when they return.

Rita [Rita Braver, CBS News].

Q. Mr. President, does the way this is coming down give Americans any reason to feel a little bit more secure that this particular group is not going to carry out something else, or do you just not know yet?

The President. I think Americans can be secure that our country has able law enforcement officials, that we work together well, that we have prevented terrorist activities from occurring, that, obviously, every civilized society is at risk of this sort of thing. I cannot, I must not comment on any of the specific people involved in this investigation at this time.

Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, CNN].

Q. Mr. President, is there anything that has come across your desk so far to suggest that this bombing in Oklahoma City could have been prevented, as other terrorist incidents that you were referring to were prevented? Was there a failure somewhere down the chain of command, someplace that a tip, a clue, a source, could have provided information leading to this explosion?

The President. I have no evidence to that effect at this time.

Gene [Gene Gibbons, Reuters].

Q. Mr. President, there has been a loud, constant drumbeat in this country in recent years: The Government is the enemy; the Government is bad. Given the way this case seems to be pointing, do you think that in any way contributed to what happened in Oklahoma City on Wednesday?

The President. I think it's important that we not speculate about the motives, the atmosphere, or anything else until this investigation is complete. It can only—anything I say could only undermine the successful conclusion of this.

Q. Mr. President, you have been cautious about warning us and all Americans not to draw any conclusions over the past several days. Can you rule out a foreign tie to a domestic group, and can you in any way blame this incident on any kind of climate presently in this country?

The President. I cannot rule in or rule out anything. It would be inappropriate. The investigation has not been completed. And again, that's a variation of the question that was just asked. I cannot and I should not characterize this in terms of the climate or anything else at this time.

Let us do this investigation. Let the people get the work done. Let us follow every lead, pursue every alley. Let's wrap this up so we can see it whole, and then there will be time

for this kind of analysis. I understand why you want to do it. It's perfectly understandable and appropriate, but it's not ripe yet. We have to solve the heinous crime first.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:05 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. The Executive order of January 23 prohibiting transactions with terrorists is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on Senator David Pryor's Decision Not To Seek Reelection

April 21, 1995

Throughout his career, David Pryor has been a champion of America's finest values. He is a fierce advocate for our children and the elderly and a ready voice for the cause of reason. From the State legislature and the Governor's office in Arkansas to the U.S. Congress, he has served our country from the bottom of his heart

and in the best possible way. His retirement from the Senate will be a loss felt by us all.

I know I can continue to count on David's exceptional counsel, both as a valued adviser and a trusted friend. I look forward to his continued active involvement in the business of our Nation.

Remarks by the President and Hillary Clinton to Children on the Oklahoma City Bombing

April 22, 1995

The President. Today I've been joined by the First Lady and by children of people who work for our Federal Government, because we are especially concerned about how the children of America are reacting to the terrible events in Oklahoma City. Our family has been struggling to make sense of this tragedy, and I know that families all over America have as well.

We know that what happened in Oklahoma is very frightening, and we want children to know that it's okay to be frightened by something as bad as this. Your parents understand it. Your teachers understand it. And we're all there for you, and we're working hard to make sure that this makes sense to you and that you can overcome your fears and go on with your lives.

The First Lady has been very worried about all the children of our country in the aftermath

of this tragedy, and she wants to talk with you, too, today.

Mrs. Clinton. I'm very happy to have this chance to talk with children here in the White House and children who maybe have been watching cartoons or just getting up around the country and turning on the television set. I know that many children around the country have been very frightened by what they have seen and heard, particularly on television, in the last few days. And I'm sure that you, like many of the children I've already talked to, are really concerned because they don't know how something so terrible could have happened here in our country.

But you know, whenever you feel scared or worried, I want you to remember that your parents and your friends and your family members all love you and are going to do everything they can to take care of you and to protect